

Agency for Change Podcast: Amber Nore, Director of Community Engagement, and Brian & Dylan, Big/Little Mentor Match, Big Brothers Big Sisters Lincoln

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Dylan: 0:01

Look what you do have instead of what you don't have.

Announcer: 0:07

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman: 0:31

Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change podcast. So I am really excited because today we are going to do something really special. We are highlighting the incredible work of Big Brothers Big Sisters Lincoln by hearing directly from both the organization and those they serve. We have with us Amber Nore, the Director of Community Engagement, and a Big Brother and Little Brother match that exemplifies the power of mentorship. So let's dive in. First, I want to welcome Amber. Amber as the Director of Community Engagement. Could you start by telling us more about the organization, both the national history and the local history here in Lincoln, Nebraska?

Amber Nore: 1:24

Yes, absolutely, I'd be delighted to. Big Brothers Big Sisters is a mentoring agency. We provide community-based mentoring. We partner a youth, which we call a little, along with an adult referred to as a big, and they can then go into the community and explore activities together and they grow a mentoring partnership that in turn positively impacts the youth and the adult's life. This actually started over a hundred years ago in New York State. There was a judge who noticed a high number of young men coming through his judicial system and the idea was to partner these young men with a responsible adult male to provide positive impact on the youth's life, in turn affecting the recidivism of seeing them come back through the system. And it was very successful. So Big Brothers of America was formed. Big Sisters of America then formed some years later and at one point they combined to become Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America. Fast forward a little bit to where we are in Lincoln. Let's go about 50 years ago. The YMCA partnered with the Sheriff's Department here to form a mentoring program called Y-PALS and that partnered youth and adults together for community-based mentoring. They joined Big Brothers Big Sisters of America and became Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Heartland, which they were for many years, and then Big Brothers Big Sisters Lincoln. Then, effective this year in January, we combined with Omaha, and so Big Brothers Big Sisters Midlands now is serving a number of counties

across Nebraska and a couple of towns in Iowa as well. So our reach is expanding because the need for positive mentors for youth continues to grow.

Lyn Wineman: 3:26

I imagine that's a need that will never end. So, Amber, it feels to me like this organization is 100 years old, 50 years in the community, but an organization that is always innovating. And I bet almost all of our listeners, if not 100%, have heard of Big Brothers Big Sisters. But I wonder if they know the impact. Like, could you share the impact of the work that you do?

Amber Nore: 3:52

Yes, in partnering youth with caring adult mentors. It impacts their life in a positive way, both the youth and the adult, and where we see the positive effect is in school performance. We see a positive effect just in overall confidence in identifying goals and something that really struck me before coming to work with Big Brothers, big Sisters it was evident that the youth's life is impacted in a positive way and it's wonderful to have a mentor. What's really made an impression on me is the stories that the mentors share with me about how their life has been impacted, just the richness that the experience of being a mentor to a youth has given to their life, and how they've learned and grown as well. So it in turn affects the whole community because we're all benefiting from the power of positive mentorship.

Lyn Wineman: 4:48

I love that. I love the description, Amber, but can I tell you what I'm really excited about? I'm really excited that we're going to hear about it firsthand, because I promised in the intro. I promised in the intro that today we're doing something special and we have with us Brian Garretson, who serves as a big brother in Lincoln, Nebraska, and his fabulous little brother, Dylan, and their journey together started in November of 2023. I hear they've been building a strong and trusting friendship ever since. So, Brian, I have a question for you as a big brother what motivated you to volunteer with the program?

Brian Garretson : 5:33

Absolutely. That's a great question. I moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, in the summer of 2023, having stepped into Nebraska only one other time in my life.

Lyn Wineman: 5:44

Oh wow, well welcome. Welcome to Nebraska.

Brian Garretson : 5:48

Thank you. Yeah, originally from New Jersey, and then I've been in the Marine Corps the past eight years. So I was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, and received orders to Lincoln, Nebraska, so moved here over the summer. I work at the school right at UNL right now doing ROTC work, and one of my coworkers, Jordan Shea he's a Lieutenant in the Navy was involved in the program and he's like you know what? You'd probably be pretty good at this and I'm like it's a different type of unit. We're away from the fleet. There's a little bit more free time when we're in this type of unit, if you will, the more

forward deployed. So I saw an opportunity to engage with the community that I didn't really know all too much about. I would say the rest was history. Another motivation is the fact that growing up I was the younger sibling, so I didn't have that opportunity to be that big brother and there's certain responsibility that comes with that. But that is a great level of responsibility and it's been awesome to learn that through Dylan.

Lyn Wineman: 6:53

Dylan, it's your turn. Dylan's been waiting here very patiently as the little brother in this match. Dylan, my question for you is what has the experience been like for you to be matched with Brian?

Dylan: 7:10

Well, it's actually been very great. I'm not going to lie, to be honest.

Lyn Wineman: 7:16

Thank you for not lying. He seems like a pretty great guy. Do you guys have fun together?

Dylan: 7:20

We do have a lot of fun together. We went to this board game place in downtown and they have this game I like it's called Pokemon Monopoly. I beat them every time and, to be honest, it's like the best time ever going there.

Lyn Wineman: 7:41

Do either of you? In addition to the story about playing Pokemon Monopoly, which does sound like a lot of fun. Do either of you have any favorite stories from your time together that you'd like to share? Dylan, let's start with you. What stories can you tell me?

Dylan: 7:57

My favorite stor while being with Brian, there's a fast food chain next not next to where I live, but next to the Walmart where we always go shopping and there's this place called Culver's. I don't know if you guys have ever been to it, but it's a really good fast food restaurant.

Lyn Wineman: 8:15

I always order the custard when I go. What do you order at Culver's?

Dylan: 8:20

I always order a burger with some fries.

Lyn Wineman: 8:23

Oh yeah, burger with fries, that's a great choice.

Dylan: 8:25

And they do have some little bit of fish options.

Lyn Wineman: 8:28

Oh, I'll have to check that out, so tell me about you guys going to Culver's together.

Dylan: 8:34

Well, actually he's never been there, which kind of shocked me and I was like you broke my heart for a second, and we tried it out. He said it was kind of like Freddy's, which is a whole other story, but Freddy's is better he said but Culver's is like an 8 or 7 out of 10, he said and I said it's actually pretty good for the first time I've eaten there.

Lyn Wineman: 9:03

I love that, you know what I love about that story, Dylan. I love that. I bet Brian, as your mentor, teaches you some things, but in that situation you were teaching Brian some things because he had never been to Culver's before. Brian, do you have any favorite stories you'd like to share? I can tell you guys have a really great connection together.

Brian Garretson : 9:24

I definitely have a few stories. Dylan is a very funny and smart kid. Something that's been eye-opening in this experience is the reminder of natural energy that 11-year-olds possess so this program has been great and I guess it's a little bit of a shameless plug but with hooking us up with things in the community that Dylan and Brian normally wouldn't do. Like, a great example is we got they gave us discounts for a local rock climbing place.

Dylan and I are being amateur rock climbers was absolutely hysterical.

Lyn Wineman: 10:00

All right, I have a question for Dylan. Which one of you is the better rock climber?

Dylan: 10:02

Definitely me.

Brian Garretson : 10:16

And then we became big fans of the YMCA's pool, which is awesome because especially during the winter too, because they have a great indoor heated pool.

Lyn Wineman: 10:21

We're so lucky in this community to have such a great YMCA.

Brian Garretson : 10:24

So I would say it's doing. The stuff that you know, Brian and Dylan, normal people here in Lincoln wouldn't do, is what makes this program so interesting. It's, you know, experiencing something unique.

Lyn Wineman: 10:39

Yeah, I really feel like you both are gaining energy and benefit in the program. And since you mentioned Shameless Plug, we're all about Shameless Plug, so I'd like to ask you, Brian, what would you tell someone who's thinking about getting involved with or supporting Big Brothers Big Sisters?

Brian Garretson : 11:00

Yeah, I would say this is a great way, whether you're new to a community or you are from that community a great opportunity and method to see the community through a different lens.

Just seeing, you know how my nine to five in Lincoln looks very different than Dylan's nine to five. And then when I see him after school or over a weekend and talking about what happened in school today, he's like what PT, did you do? You know, that sort of discourse, just seeing life through a different lens of an 11 year old, is absolutely interesting, entertaining, inspiring. So I would tell them that if you're looking to see the community through a different way and if you're looking to give back and do some reflection on yourself, this is a great opportunity to do so that's awesome.

Lyn Wineman: 11:49

All right, Dylan, you're up. What would you tell someone who's thinking about getting involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters?

Dylan: 11:57

I would say for them, for sponsoring, but giving money or supporting this company is like a really great option. This company. I can tell it's built off trust and fun and happiness. I can tell, and plus, you're helping kids that might not have a father figure or a brother figure, you know.

Lyn Wineman: 12:24

Dylan, I think you should consider a career in marketing someday. You're're good at this.

Dylan: 12:26

Yeah, I might.

Lyn Wineman: 12:28

All right, all right, there you have it. Well, hey, I want to ask you another question, and this is for anyone Dylan, Brian or Amber who would like to share, because we have done over 200 episodes of the Agency for Change podcast and I've asked this question on every single episode, because I love inspirational quotes and I wonder if any of you have a quote you'd like to share with me, either a quote from someone else or an original quote or something you like to say to people. Anyone want to start?

Brian Garretson : 13:07

I got one. I may not say it correctly verbatim, but I'm going to do my best. So in JFK's speech in which he was addressing the United States why we should go to the moon, he said we should go to the moon not because it is easy, but because it is hard. What I take from that is you should do hard things because you might surprise yourself.

Lyn Wineman: 13:28

Absolutely. That is so great, so great. Anyone else have a quote to share or something they like to say? Dylan, I see you've got your thinking cap on.

Dylan: 13:40

I mean to be honest, I don't have anything, but maybe an inspirational quote might be like look what you do have instead of what you don't have.

Lyn Wineman: 13:51

Oh, my goodness, I'm going to reach across and give you a high five, because that was that was awesome. Awesome, Amber, you're in the hot seat now. These, this match here. They've got some inspiration going on.

Amber Nore: 14:06

They really do. Oh my gosh. My favorite is from a poem by Edna St Vincent Millay, wonderful poet. And uh, she says my candle burns at both ends. It will not last the night, but ah, my foes, and oh, my friends, it gives a lovely light.

Lyn Wineman: 14:30

Amber, that's beautiful. I can tell you have said that one a couple of times. That's wonderful and actually talking about being a lovely light, this is probably a good time to ask you about the need for current mentors. I've got to imagine that you probably have more kids than you have mentors. Is that true? We do. That is accurate, and so what do we say to people who might be on the fence or maybe they haven't even thought about being a mentor before.

Amber Nore: 15:09

You know that's something that I like to encourage people to think about. They worry am I going a good mentor? Is it a time commitment? Is it cost a lot of money? You know, I will tell you. We ask for a one-

year commitment as a mentor minimum. Many of our matches are together for years, up until kids graduate from high school, and then they still keep into contact even beyond. But we don't ask you to sign on for many years. It just seems to naturally evolve. So you have a 12-month commitment because we have just found, like we have evidence-based studies that show any really any less than 12 months isn't creating the kind of impact that we're looking for, and so as you start to look at building and developing that relationship and that is that 12 month is what we ask for as a minimum and you meet maybe once a week, three to four times a month, we provide activities monthly that people can choose from to do.

You heard the boys share some of the fun passes to try things and we partner in the community. What is really special with Big Brothers, big Sisters is our match support program. So, as a mentor, you always have a match support specialist there to help problem solve, brainstorm, listen, guide you talk about ideas, check in with you regularly so that you're not on your own yeah and anyone that has a positive attitude and good leadership qualities can is certainly invited to apply. We do a very extensive background check.

Yes and we provide orientation and training and are with you every step of the way. So at this time we have a lot of young men waiting for their big brother. That's the biggest need right now is finding those excellent men to come and serve as a positive role model for you. Just like we heard the story today. So this is teaching a young man how to tie a tie, shake a hand, um, be polite, um, you know, in positive activities in the community and doing homework and even just checking in. So how was your day, is what we are looking for, but we of course, match uh, girls and boys to mentors.

Lyn Wineman: 17:30

Fabulous Well I could really see with Dylan and Brian. I could see the strong connection they have but I also could really feel that Brian, as the big brother is, definitely has some really positive takeaways from the match and the program as well, and it feels to me like Amber since the pandemic, so many people have kind of reevaluated their lives and I hear so many people say I want to make a difference. This is a way to make a real difference, isn't it?

Amber Nore: 18:11

Absolutely. This is a way to make a difference.

Lyn Wineman: 18:13

Yeah, so for people who want to find out more, they want to check out what it'd be like to be a mentor, maybe they want to donate, maybe they want to support in a different way. What is the best way for them to connect with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lincoln.

Amber Nore: 18:31

Visit our website bbbsmidlands.org, and there you can learn about how to refer youth to the program. If you have a youth that would benefit from a mentor, you can also express your interest and get information on becoming a mentor with our program.

We have a monthly giving program that you can participate in and a variety of events throughout Lincoln, Omaha and Council Bluffs. So there's a number of ways to get involved and you can do all of them or whichever feels most authentic to you, but we really welcome anyone who would like to come and have that positive impact.

Lyn Wineman: 19:11

That's fantastic. We will have that web address in the show notes on the KidGlov website as well for anyone who maybe didn't catch it or wants to come back later and check it out. So, Amber, this has been such a fun conversation. As we wrap up our time together today, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Amber Nore: 19:38

The most important thing that I would like for our viewers to take away is to think about the power of connection and the impact that it can make on as you heard from the little's life and the big's life as well as the community, and that having that positive mentor relationship truly benefits everyone.

Lyn Wineman: 20:04

That's just great. Amber Brian Dylan, thank you so much for sharing your experiences with us today. I fully believe the world needs more people like all of you, more organizations like Big Brothers, big Sisters. Thank you for being a part of this special episode of the Agency for Change podcast.

Announcer: 20:26

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